

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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SARS

What is SARS?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus. SARS was first seen in Asia on February 26, 2003. It spread to over two dozen countries in Europe, North America, South America, Australia, Africa and Asia before the outbreak ended in late 2003.

How is SARS spread?

SARS is mainly spread through close person-to-person contact. According to the CDC, it is thought that SARS is spread when someone with the disease coughs or sneezes droplets into the air. The virus can also spread when a person touches an object or surface with the virus on it and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth. SARS might also spread through the air or by other unknown ways.

What is meant by “close contact”?

Close contact means having lived with or cared for a person with SARS. It also means having direct contact with respiratory droplets or body fluids from a SARS patient. Close contact includes:

- Hugging and kissing
- Sharing eating or drinking utensils
- Being within 3 feet of someone who has SARS.

Close contact does not include walking by a person or briefly sitting across the room.

What are the signs and symptoms of SARS?

SARS usually begins with a fever greater than 100.4° F. The disease may cause chills, body aches and headache. Some people may have mild respiratory symptoms. After 2 to 7 days, patients may get a dry cough and have trouble breathing. Most patients develop pneumonia.

Who is at greatest risk of getting SARS?

People who have had close contact with an infected person, and health care workers who did not use infection control procedures while caring for a SARS patient, are at greatest risk.

How can SARS be prevented?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs may be used if soap and water are not available and if hands are not visibly dirty.
- During an outbreak, avoid close contact with large numbers of people as much as possible to decrease the chance of infection.
- CDC does not recommend routine use of masks or other personal, protective equipment while in public areas.

- Avoid settings where SARS is most likely to be transmitted; such as health care facilities caring for SARS patients.
- CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO) may issue travel advisories or alerts during an outbreak. Follow recommended travel and infection control advisories.
- Stay informed about SARS using reputable websites, including CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/> and WHO at www.who.int/ith/en/index.html.

How is SARS treated?

Treatment may include antibiotics used for bacterial causes of atypical pneumonia, antiviral medications, steroids to reduce lung inflammation, and supportive care such as oxygen, hydration and nutrition treatment.

**For more information on SARS, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free
1 (800) 848-5533**

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